

# Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders: Special Focus

## The Economic Impact of FAS

**According to Henrick Harwood of the Lewin Group, an individual with FAS can incur a lifetime health cost of \$860,000.** In his study, titled “International Guidelines for Estimating the Costs of Substance Abuse.”,<sup>1</sup> Harwood “assesses the overall burden on the economy in use and loss of resources per year”. This number only represents the costs of full-blown FAS. The total cost of treating Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is estimated to be much higher.

**In 2003, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome cost the United States \$5.4 billion.** Direct costs were \$3.9 billion, and indirect costs added another \$1.5 billion. This figure is based on statistics which estimate an FAS birth rate of 2 per 1,000 births.

**Most of the existing research only takes into account FAS, which is the most extreme of the conditions caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol.** Chuck Lupton of the SAMHSA FASD Center for Excellence observed that the work done on costs of FAS, “represent the tip of the iceberg.”<sup>2</sup> Individuals with FASD make up a much larger group. The latest studies estimate that 40,000 infants are born each year with FASD. That translates to a new case for 1 out of every 100 births.

**Direct costs** include the actual use of goods and services by an affected individual, such as:

- Health care
- Mental health services
- Special education
- Residential care
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Costs for incarceration

**Indirect costs** include the loss of an individual’s potential productivity:

- Disability
- Mortality
- Morbidity
- Incarceration

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<sup>1</sup> Henrick Harwood, The Lewin Group, Fairfax, Virginia, Presentation at the NOFAS “Hope for Women in Recovery Summit”, September 9, 2003, Baltimore, MD

<sup>2</sup> Chuck Lupton, *The Cost of FASD*, SAMHSA FASD Center for Excellence 2003, US Department of Health and Human Services.